

# Communication



*The truth is more important than the facts.*

Frank Lloyd Wright



# Interpretation

How do we do



*Words, like eyeglasses, obscure everything they do not make clear.*

Joseph Joubert

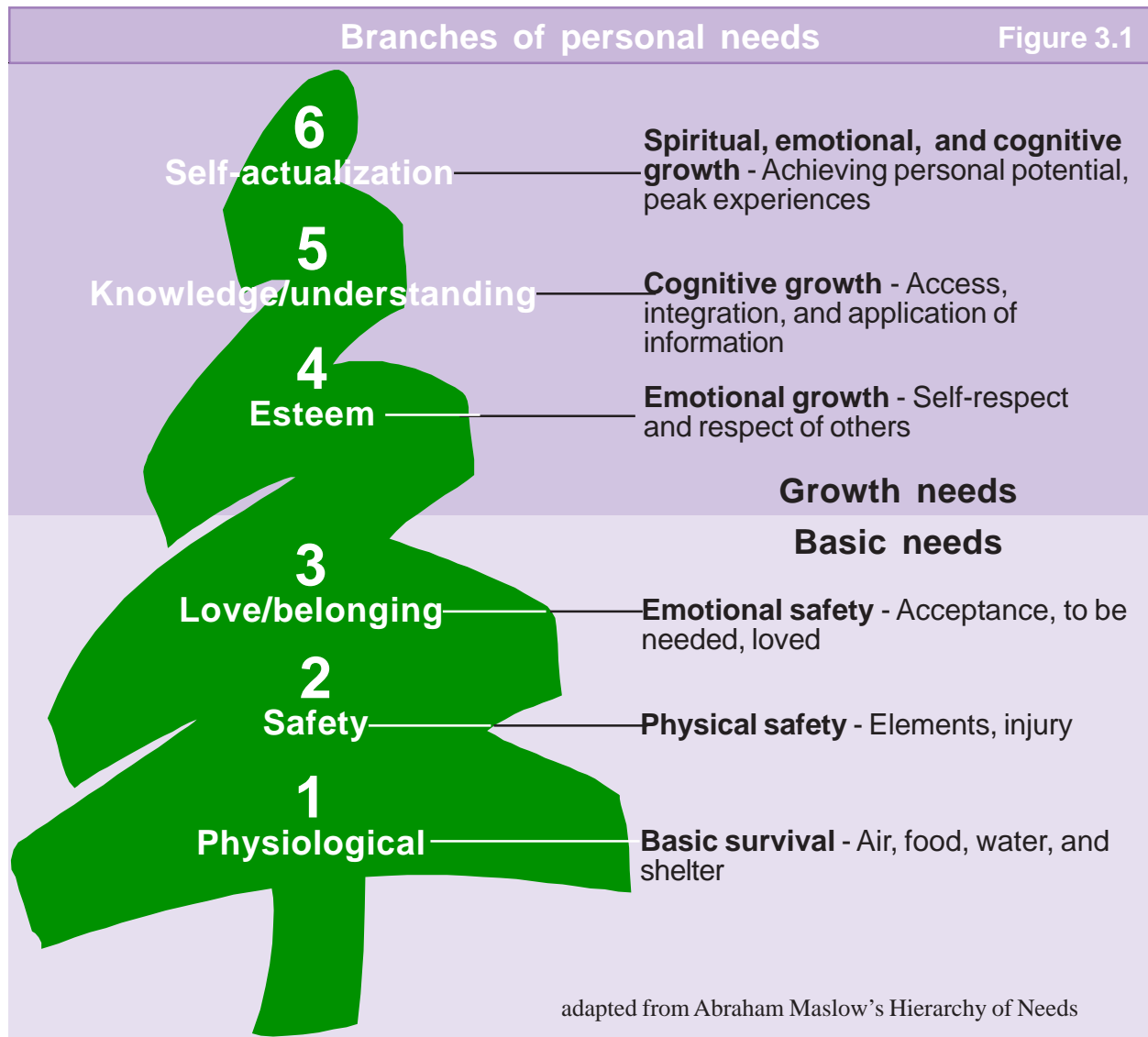
## Introduction

Now that we have an understanding of the history of interpretation, what it is and why we conduct interpretive programs, let us turn to the heart of the matter and review the basic underlying principles of communication. The principles covered in this module form the foundation of all communication regardless of the media, the venues, the audience, or the message types. Although these elements are certainly important, there is basic theory and a process of communicating that sets the stage for building the specific types of programs covered in the remaining modules of this handbook.

Communication is the process of transferring meaning and understanding from one source to another. The primary goal is that the transmission occurs between the two sources with minimal distortion of the original message. Research suggests that on average only 10% of what is verbally communicated is retained by the receiver (Grater, 1976). This is not a very encouraging statistic and suggests why our overall goal should be to provoke visitors to learn more on their own not just to retain specific content from the program.

## Understanding the visitors' needs

Before we can hope to achieve an overall goal of provoking visitors to learn more on their own, we need to understand the basic needs of our visitors. People have many needs and motives for visiting a park. Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1954) developed a hierarchy of human needs (Figure 3.1) that helps us understand the nature of those needs. A person's most basic needs must be met before their growth can be enhanced. Recognizing and understanding which level of need a visitor has is key to providing successful interpretive services. For example, a visitor's self-actualization cannot be met if they are frightened or lost.



## Information and orientation services

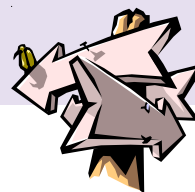
The first and most common method of helping visitors meet their basic needs is through providing visitor information and orientation services. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, information and orientation are among the basic visitor needs that must be met first. Information services are those involved with answering the *what* and *why* questions, and orientation includes information that is *where* and *when* related. For example, the most common question asked in most parks is, "Where is the bathroom?" Nothing else can be achieved unless this need is met first.



## Information and orientation services



Information or orientation?		
Whats and whys	vs	Wheres and whens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of tree is that?</li> <li>• Why does the tide change?</li> <li>• What type of fish are in the lake?</li> <li>• Why can't I take my dog on the trail?</li> <li>• What Native Americans live in this region?</li> <li>• What time does the boat ramp open?</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where is the campground?</li> <li>• When is the next tour?</li> <li>• Where is the best trail to see wildflowers?</li> <li>• When does the fishing clinic begin?</li> <li>• When is the best time to surf?</li> </ul>



Think about basic orientation and informational needs that you had when you first arrived at Mott Training Center. You needed to know some basic things such as: *Where is my room? Where is the cafeteria?* Now let us look at the three basic avenues through which interpreters meet visitors' informational and orientational needs.

### Information desk/entrance station

The most common place for providing information to visitors is at the entrance station or behind the desk in the visitor center. Visitors that come to these locations are usually seeking to meet their basic physiological and safety/security needs. "Where is the bathroom?" and "What kind of snakes are here?" are common types of questions that represent information and orientation needs that visitors have.

There are several methods that you can use to help facilitate meeting these needs. On a basic level, be prepared to provide clear, concise, and accurate information. One of the key things to do is to begin keeping track of what information visitors seek when you interact with them. Start keeping this list from day one. The list will evolve and grow, and with it your ability to respond to those needs. In the beginning, you may not know many of the answers, but as time passes the number of questions that you hear for the first time will dwindle. Once you have created a rather lengthy list, begin to categorize it into meaningful sub-groupings. For example, you may find many items dealing with the flora, or the rules, etc. Once you have made categories, you can create (if they do not currently exist) several books of "Commonly asked questions" that you can leave on the front desk for visitors to peruse. These will be available when you are not and thus reach even more visitors. Make the book as meaningful as possible.

## Information and orientation services



For example, if the book is on flora, try to have pictures of the plants and locations where they can be found throughout the park.

### Providing helpful information and orientation

- **Always have trail, park, local, and highway maps available**
- **Provide scratch paper for note taking**
- **Anticipate questions**
- **Provide interpretive answers** (don't just give facts; tell stories!)
- **Have common field guides and reference materials handy**

It can get tiresome hearing that same old question over and over, especially if you feel that it is a ridiculous question. There is not an interpreter in the world that cannot sympathize with you. However, keep two things in mind: 1) it is the *first* time the person standing in front of you has asked the question, and 2) they had to get up a lot of nerve to approach you. For most visitors, it takes a lot of curiosity, fear, uncertainty, etc., to spur them to ask a question. Take advantage of that. As you will learn in Module 10-Roving, these spontaneous interactions with visitors are often the most meaningful. These interactions affect the overall impression an individual has of the entire agency. Remember, you are a public servant.

### Long distance

Many of our visitor information services are not conducted face-to-face, but through long distance means such as telephone, electronic, and regular mail contacts. These methods of communication are the first line of contact for many visitors. Think about the last special location you visited. Did you call first, check out a website, or ask for brochures before you actually visited? Many first-time visitors and those traveling long distances are likely to seek out this type of information and orientation service before arriving at the park. For many, this may help determine which park they visit.

Meeting information and orientation needs for visitors over long distance is very similar to the in-person contacts. However, there are a couple of special things to consider. Be sure that you are responding to requests for information in a timely manner, especially those e-mail and regular mail contacts. Try to personalize all contacts as much as possible. For example, do not just stuff the standard bunch of brochures in an envelope and call it good. Give them what they request and include a signed note thanking them for their interest and expressing that you hope to see them when they visit. This personalized attention to detail means a great deal to visitors and functions as a great public relations tool for your agency, helping forge visitor connections to the resource.



## Information and orientation services



### Is this the person to whom I am speaking?

- **Smile while you're on the phone.** Smiling while talking changes the inflection and tone in your voice. People can hear a smile even though they may not see it.
- **Treat visitors on the phone as you would in person.** How many times have you put a person on hold who is standing in front of you?
- **Answer the phone with a greeting that reflects the park name and your name:** *Hello, my name is Carolyn. Thanks for calling Humboldt Redwoods State Park. How may I help you?*
- **Have common information ready.**

### Bulletin boards/information kiosks

The third primary avenue for providing information and orientation services to visitors is through the use of bulletin boards and information kiosks. These methods of contacting visitors are nonpersonal and do not require the physical presence of staff. As nonpersonal methods of communication, they possess many of the qualities discussed in Module 1-Introduction, regarding nonpersonal interpretation.

Of all the nonpersonal media, bulletin boards and kiosks are primarily used to convey general park information. Answering the basic what, where, when, and why questions is a common function of these mediums. Bulletin boards are probably one of the more underutilized communication mediums in parks. One of the main reasons for this is that people do not read very much. On average, most visitors read about 30-40 seconds worth of material. That is about 200-250 words (Serrell, 1996; Trapp, Gross, and Zimmerman, 1992). Writing in a short, concise, and clear manner is more difficult than writing lengthy pieces of information. As Mark Twain said, "I would have written you a shorter letter but I did not have the time." Maximize the effectiveness of bulletin boards by using a few simple pointers provided in the box below.

### Those messy bulletin boards!

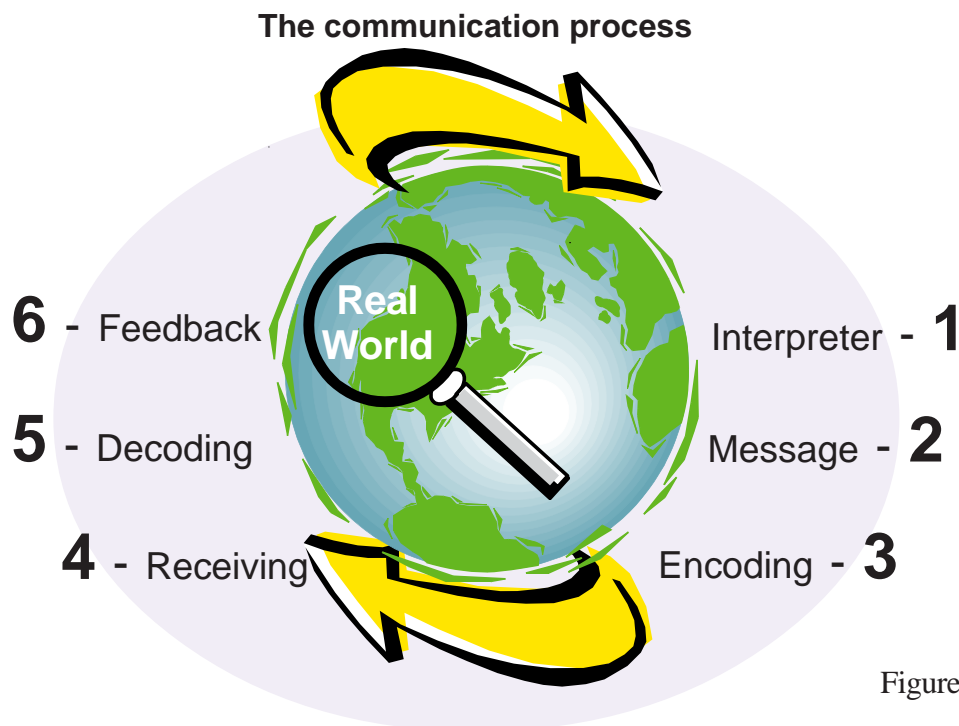
- **Keep everything up-to-date.**
- **Pictures are worth a thousand words.**
- **Minimize detail. Keep it simple and short.**
- **Organize information into meaningful categories and subcategories.**
- **Connect information to the tangibles visitors have around them.**
- **Include emergency contact information.**
- **Tell stories, do not just give facts.**
- **Use variability in size, shape, color, etc. of graphics.**
- **Use color to catch attention.**
- **Remember to follow accessibility guidelines.**



### Basic communication process

Once we have helped our visitors meet their basic needs, we can move on to using interpretation to achieve the purposes discussed in Module 2-Purpose and Value. To do this we first must have an understanding of the basic communication process. Through understanding of the basic communication process, we can maximize the visitor's retention, comprehension, and understanding of our messages. Communication (Figure 3.2) begins with a communicator (first step), in our case, an interpreter. The interpreter has a particular message that needs to be transmitted to the receiver, in our case, the visitor. The message is the second step in the communication process. Once the target message has been identified, the interpreter encodes (third step) the message into the appropriate language and communication medium. After the actual communication of the message, the visitor receives the message (fourth step) and decodes it (fifth step). After decoding, there is a feedback process (sixth step) for communication back to the interpreter. All of this occurs in a particular setting with its own set of characteristics that influences the entire process (Fazio and Gilbert, 2000).

Now let us look at each individual step in more detail. We will examine how to improve every segment of this process to increase the overall success of our communications.







## Interpreter

### Interpreter

The first step of the communication process could be considered the message as it drives communication. However, we will begin the process with the sender of a message, you the interpreter. The characteristics of an interpreter that affect the overall reception of the message by the visitor, such as appearance, voice, body language, etc., are all linked to one quality—credibility.

There are many things that affect a visitor's perception of your credibility. Remember, it does not matter how credible you actually are, all that matters is the *perception* the visitor has of your credibility. For example, you may be the resident expert in a particular topic, but if you shuffle your feet and cannot maintain eye contact, you will not appear very credible. Think about the last time you asked someone a question and he/she would not look you in the eye and answer. That person may have been telling the truth, but you were probably skeptical due to the lack of eye contact. It should also be mentioned that judgments of credibility vary depending on the target audience. In fact, all of the communication process is inextricably linked and each step impacts and affects the other steps. However, we must discuss each one separately in order to establish the foundation of communication. The following is a brief review of the major elements that affect a visitor's perception of your credibility.

## Credibility

### Content

The primary aspect that many think of when considering credibility is content. Do they know what they are talking about? Again, we will discuss many things that affect this perception, but you must begin with truthful, accurate information. There is nothing worse for your credibility than to be proven wrong during a talk. The judgment of being *trustworthy* will, in part, be influenced by whether or not visitors think you know what you are talking about. The key for success in this step is easy: do good, thorough research before presenting information to your visitors. In Module 4-Planning we will review in detail appropriate methods and practices of conducting *good* research.

### Confidence

Another characteristic that influences perceived credibility is the confidence with which you speak. Judgments of confidence are based on several elements. Voice, body language, and eye contact are three of the primary elements that influence confidence perceptions.

Eye contact is probably one of the most important factors in visitors' perceptions of confidence. "Studies have found that, whatever the status, age, gender or physical size of individuals, those who maintain effective eye contact are perceived as more honest, warmer, and more knowledgeable than those who look away from their listeners" (Brownell, 1982, p. 33). You do not want to stare at visitors, but instead maintain two or three seconds of eye contact with individuals and try to look at everyone at least once. For large audiences, do not focus your attention and eye contact on one side of the group; try to sweep the entire audience.





Your voice quality also reflects your confidence. Meek, mild, and high-pitched voices are not thought to be as confident and do not command as much attention as low-pitched authoritative voices. Anyone who has called for a dog to come knows the difference in voice tone that is required to get the dog to respond. In the midst of various distracting stimuli in a park setting, voice quality is essential to command attention. Another characteristic of the voice is the rate of speaking. Talking too fast or too slowly impacts perceptions of credibility. In addition, filling in silences in speech with *ums* and *ahs* also has a negative impact on visitor perceptions. There is great power in a dramatic pause. Know when to stop talking. Your voice should be loud enough in tone and pitch to hear, fluid in pattern, and slow enough in speed to understand.

Body language is a third element that impacts visitor perceptions of confidence and thus overall judgments of credibility. “The cues your body sends are often more accurate indicators of the way you feel and what you think than the words you choose” (Brownell, 1982, p. 33). In fact, it is estimated that approximately “60-95% of the meaning transferred in a communication system is accomplished through non-verbals” (Jurin, Danter, and Roush, 2000, p. 143). We use body language, often subconsciously, about two-thirds of the time when communicating. The trick for an interpreter is to consciously channel that use of body language in appropriate ways. Standing up straight, holding your head up, and using your body for emphasis are all ways of improving your body language. With almost everything, the key is moderation. Do not stand like a statue; you look scared. Conversely, moving too much makes you look nervous. Use your body to convey interest and enthusiasm for your topic. Slouched shoulders and folded arms denote a speaker with little confidence. The number one fear in America, second to dying, is speaking in front of others (Wallechinsky, Wallace, and Wallace, 1977). Although this training program cannot remove that fear, using simple techniques that prevent the visitor from knowing how you feel and thus impacting your perceived credibility is easy.

## **Appearance**

Physical appearance also influences credibility. The old saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is certainly applicable in this situation. However, there are generalities that can be identified regarding how appearance impacts credibility. One of the primary elements that will increase credibility is your uniform. Wearing a uniform typically signifies having authority and being of an expert status; be sure your uniform is always neat, pressed, and clean.

*The way to become boring is to say everything.*

Voltaire



## Message

### Passion and sincerity

Finally, the passion, enthusiasm, and sincerity with which you speak affects the communication process. Tilden (1957) called this the “priceless ingredient.” Visitors respond to and can sense the innate interest of the speaker. Changing the variable voice inflection helps pace, rhythm, and tone of speech to convey interest in the subject matter. Active, animated body language and facial expressions help convey passion. Think about hearing monotone speakers. It is hard to believe that they are really interested in what they are saying. The best method to improve and convey your sincerity is to have it. Believe in what you are doing, the agency for whom you work, and the message you are conveying to the public. The audience forgives many technical mistakes *if* they believe you are sincere in the attempt.

*Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.*

Thomas A. Edison

#### Personal characteristics that impact communication

- voice quality
- body language
- accuracy
- appearance
- eye contact
- passion
- sincerity
- uniform
- title

## Message

The second step in the communication process is the message itself. As interpreters, we call this the theme of the program. We will review themes in detail in Module 5-Programs. For now, we will limit our discussion to the more generic communication process and message. The message is the reason communication takes place. There is something that needs to be conveyed to the public by management, and thus it must be communicated through some medium. There are several techniques and strategies that can be used to create successful messages. In addition, there are several key considerations to message formation. We will review some of the basic characteristics of an effective message and examine more advanced techniques for improving persuasive communication. Keep in mind that the overall goal is minimal distortion of the original message between the sender (interpreter) and the receiver (visitor).

The basics of good message delivery are things we instinctively know. Think about telling a good joke. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Each has its place in the story and must be told in the appropriate order and with the right emphasis. Communicating interpretively is not a new form of communication. It is simply being able to tell a good story. And in our case, that story has a moral or message we are trying to convey.



*Dry words and dry facts will not fire hearts.*

John Muir

## RAPPORT: basic message effectiveness

California State Parks has developed a system of evaluating communication effectiveness that includes many of the basics of good message formation. This method establishes uniform standards of “good” communication. The acronym **RAPPORT** (see Table 3.3) represents the system that is managed through the Standard **RAPPORT** form DPR 461. Next we will review each of the **RAPPORT** standards for interpretation.

### RAPPORT =

Table 3.3

- **Relevant** - Related to the audience
- **Accurate** - Well prepared and researched
- **Provocative/enjoyable** - Interesting and fun
- **Programmatically accessible** - Accommodating for all visitors
- **Organized** - Logical sequence of ideas presented
- **Retained** - Memorable
- **Thematic** - A central message throughout.

### Relevant

An effective message must be relevant to the audience. Visitors must be able to understand the concept in terms of something they already know or something with which they can associate. For example, to explain an erupting volcano, you could shake a can of soda and ask visitors what will happen if you pull the tab. This analogy makes the concept of eruption clear because most people understand or even have firsthand experience with a shaken carbonated drink. Without contextual understanding, new information is sterile and will quickly be forgotten. In addition, if information is not contextually relevant for an audience, it could cause them to become bored or feel stupid.

Sam Ham (1992) suggests making information personal to visitors using **self-referencing**, a technique to get visitors to tap into their own experiences and memories as new information is conveyed. “*How many of you have ever...?*” or “*Remember the first time you made a snowball with your bare hands?*” are both examples of self-referencing. Self-referencing is a simple technique that can increase visitors’ relation to the information by tapping into their own memories.



## Message

Another technique is called **labeling** (Ham, 1992). Labeling involves using more specific terms to relate to the audience besides generic pronouns such as, *you, us, and we*. “*As Americans, we can all relate to the sense of tragedy from the events of September 11, 2001.*” The phrase “As Americans” is labeling. “*As cadets at the Mott Training Center...*” is another example. Use care when labeling so you do not exclude people needlessly or include people in negative or derogatory categories.

Another way to relate to the audience is through the use of things that we all share in common regardless of our background, age, ethnicity, etc. The National Park Service calls these **universal concepts**. Universal concepts are things such as family, love, hate, fear, hunger, etc. Most of the basic needs on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs are universal concepts. Tapping into basic needs and emotions is always a sure way of reaching visitors on a personal level.

### Tilden’s first principle

***Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.***

Freeman Tilden

### Techniques to increase relevance

- **Analogies** - Drawing similarities between two things. *A shaken soda can is a way to think of a volcanic eruption.*
- **Examples** - Referring to something that is representative of what you are talking about. *A redwood is an example of a living fossil.*
- **Stories** - The telling or accounting of an event that explains or describes what you want to interpret. *For example, this would be like telling the creation story of the Pomo to convey how they revere the earth.*
- **Metaphors** - A figure of speech using a word or phrase to describe something not usually associated with the word. *The avalanche glided down the slope.*
- **Similes** - Comparing two things using like or as. *Tectonic plates can hit together like bumper cars.*
- **Visual aids** - Using a tangible object to demonstrate, represent, or explain something. *Pour water onto a dry sponge to represent how marshes soak up and hold water.*
- **Universal concepts** - Anything that is known, felt, or believed regardless of most demographic characteristics. *For example, most emotions and Maslow’s basic needs are included.*
- **Practical application** - Demonstrating the usefulness or application of something. *Showing visitors the medicinal qualities of plants and indicating potential uses in the future.*



## Accurate

One of the key characteristics that we discussed as affecting and influencing credibility is the presentation of factual, truthful information. This is not as easy as it seems on the surface. As stated earlier in Module 2-Purpose and Value there are three basic types of messages that we interpret for the public; cultural, natural, and managerial. In each of these, it is important to present a fair, unbiased, and accurate picture of one whole story. Tilden (1967) points out there are many whole stories to tell regarding any one topic. The choice of *which* story to tell is driven by many factors that we will discuss in Module 4-Planning. The key for accuracy is to conduct honest, thorough, and unbiased research in an attempt to truly understand the concept, theory, story, or fact. When conducting research, you soon realize that you can never know “the truth” of an event, place, time, or scientific concept. What you can do is adhere to good research practices and paint as honest and accurate a picture as you can.

*Your need to talk does not create in me a need to listen.*

Mason Cooley

## Provocative and enjoyable

Creating programs that are provocative and enjoyable are characteristics that fall at both ends of the success continuum for interpretation. Creating enjoyable or pleasurable presentations is a primary on-site goal for our programs while provocation is a significant off-site goal.

Sam Ham talked about the enjoyable and pleasurable aspects of interpretation and identified them as essential characteristics of successful programs primarily because visitors that attend interpretive programs in parks are a noncaptive audience. Although we hope they do not, they can get up and leave the program any time they choose. In addition, the experience itself is a recreational experience. We provide programs, in part, to help increase visitor enjoyment of the resource. It is our job to make presentations interesting and enjoyable. There is nothing that is inherently boring, but our interpretation of it can make it either boring or interesting. In fact, it is our *job* to make science, history, culture, and management come to life for visitors.

### Infusing enjoyment into facts

- Smile
- Tell stories, do not just give facts
- Encourage participation
- Do hands-on demonstrations
- Ask questions
- Use analogies



- Be enthusiastic
- Use visual aids
- Engage visitors senses
- Relate it



Mainly, *LOVE* what you do!



## Message

***The aim is to illuminate and reveal the alluring world outdoors by introducing determining influences and the respondent tendencies.***

Enos Mills

If we make learning fun and enjoyable, we create life-long-learners. Provoking the visitors to be curious, to want to know more, and to seek more information on their own is the primarily off-site goal of our programs. Given the nature of science, knowledge, and of interpretation itself, one of the great achievements of an interpretive program is when the visitor begins to question. As important as a skillfully conveyed message is the result of having visitors wonder, question, and desire to know more!

Methods of accomplishing this wonderment are not easily put into a list. In fact, it is the success of a number of things that results in provocation. There are some things you can do to help facilitate provocation through your programs. Do not always have “the answer;” instead ask good, thought provoking questions throughout. In addition, always encourage discussion and feedback during your programs.

### Tilden's fourth principle

***The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.***

Freeman Tilden

### Programmatically accessible

Programmatically accessible means creating programs that are accessible to the general public. Making our programs programmatically accessible has a lot to do with considering our target audience's needs, wants, special concerns, and circumstances. It also involves thinking about who is *not* coming and asking why. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA-PL 101-336) is a civil rights law informing all that people with disabilities have the right to visit, enjoy, and participate in public recreational programs and facilities. Although we will not provide a complete review of the legislation and how it affects California State Parks, we will discuss things to consider when designing communication techniques. Refer to *All Visitors Welcome* for an indepth discussion of techniques and strategies for accessibility (Porter, 1994).



## Make it accessible!

- **Begin each program with a thorough review of all of the basic visitor needs** (i.e., bathroom, breaks, length of walk, dangers, etc.) and any services or facilities that are accessible. Be sure that you always provide this announcement, not just when someone is in the audience that you believe needs to hear it.
- **Face the audience and speak clearly.** Many hearing impaired people read lips.
- **Incorporate as many senses as you can during the presentation.** Those with limited English can still appreciate seeing, touching, and doing something.
- **When using visual aids, be sure that everyone gets to see them.** Ask visitors up front who have seen the object, to *please* step back and let those behind come forward to see.

**Be considerate of others - be a good host!**

## Organized

An organized presentation is one of the more fundamental characteristics of interpretation. Information that is organized is presented in an easy to understand manner that follows a logical progression of ideas. Again, this is like telling a good joke. It has a beginning that is needed to set up the punch line and a middle that makes the punch line funny. If information is not presented in an easily understood manner then the audience will soon get frustrated and might leave.

There are four primary techniques that can be used to help organize a presentation: a cognitive map, transition sentences, themes/subthemes, and practice. The use of advanced organizers or cognitive maps are proven ways of increasing organization and thus impacting knowledge acquisition and understanding from communication (Hammit, 1981; Knopf, 1981). Just as you would use a spatial map to find your way in a foreign place, cognitive maps provide the mental orientation for the interpretive journey. Cognitive map theory suggests that providing an initial structure through which the listener can organize

## So what's a cognitive map?

Here is an example of a cognitive map.

*Today, we will journey together and discover what the forest has to provide. That way if you are ever lost in the woods you will be able to survive! We will discover the easiest way to find water, what the most nutritious thing is to eat, how to build a fire and seek shelter, and finally how to find your way out. We will take an easy, short walk around the visitor center and end up right back here in about one hour.*





## Message

the information helps facilitate understanding and comprehension of the message. Learners are said to construct new information and cognitive maps serve as the blueprints for that construction. A cognitive map is telling the visitor what is going to happen.

A second technique to increase organization is to use transition sentences. These sentences provide listeners the verbal cues that you have finished one main point and are continuing on to the next. They allow the listener to fade in and out of attention and not lose the ability to follow the program. For example, a listener who has been watching a bird and not listening to your program could hear the transition *“Now that we have discovered how to find water in the forest, let us turn to three primary ways to find food for survival”* and return to the program without feeling lost.

It is important not to have too many main points in an interpretive presentation. Studies have shown that people can only process seven (plus or minus two) new pieces of information at one time. In fact, most of the literature recommends five main points (Ham, 1992; Knudson et al., 1995; Miller, 1956). That is why students in school have to take notes, because they could not possibly remember all the new information presented at one time.

Remember, your audience will not be taking notes and will certainly not be able to process too much new information. At the same time, too little information could cause them to become bored. A good amount of information is five new main ideas. These main ideas should be organized around a main theme or message, which is the third technique of increasing organization. We will review thematic presentation of information later.

A fourth technique for improving organization is practice. How well an interpreter knows the program directly results in the subsequent ability to present the information to the public in an organized fashion. Trying to remember what you are supposed to say results in a choppy jumbled program. Being prepared directly affects the outward organizational appearance of information. We will review strategies and methods of practicing in Module 6-Talk.

### Retained

We want the message or main point of the interpretation to be memorable. Providing a good organizational structure and a sound theme or message facilitates this retention of information. There are other techniques that can be used to increase retention (see Table 3.4).

#### Lest they forget

Table 3.4

- **Repeat** main theme/message often
- **Ask** questions throughout to assess retention
- **Make** it relevant
- **Provide** summaries throughout and especially at the end
- **Provide** opportunities to apply the information
- **Incorporate** many senses

# Message



*Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited while imagination embraces the entire world.*

Albert Einstein

*People are out for recreation and need restful, intellectual visions, and not dull, dry facts, rules, and manuals.*

Enos Mills

## Thematic

The theme is the anchor point to which all of the information presented will relate. It is the message of the program. Subthemes are the submessages of each main point within the program (see Table 3.5). Using themes and subthemes around which the information is organized serves two main purposes. First, as indicated above, it provides an organizational hierarchy for the program. Second, the message is the reason you are presenting the program. In other words, the theme and subthemes guide your research, establish the structure of your presentation, and convey the reason or message of the program.

Having a theme is what makes communication interpretation. The theme is the reason you interpret. It is your message for the visitor to take home. If you think about a story with a lot of facts and bits of information, after time, much of the story will be forgotten. However, if the story has a message, that message will likely be retained longer than any of the individual details that made up the story. This is the true success of an interpretive program, not that the visitor walks away knowing all the plants you talked about, but that they retained the bigger message or theme. In Module 5-Programs we will review techniques and methods of developing good themes.

Using the elements of **RAPPORT** will help you develop high quality, effective interpretive programs. It will also insure that your programs meet the standards by which the Department evaluates interpretive performance. Remember **RAPPORT**!



### The theme says it all

Table 3.5

**Theme:** *The forest provides, so you could survive if lost in the woods.*

**Subtheme 1:** *Find water first, as it is essential to survival.*

**Subtheme 2:** *Food is as easy to find as turning over a rock.*



# Message

## Persuasive techniques

As discussed in Module 2-Purpose and Value there are informational, educational, and inspirational types of messages. However, we could consider all messages to be persuasive in nature. All of the messages we provide for visitors are aimed at influencing them in some manner, whether that influence is aimed at what they know (cognition), think (attitudes), feel (emotions), or do (behaviors). Whether the goal is to alleviate fear or to educate them about the resource, we are trying to influence them in some fashion. Given this relationship, there are several methods that can be used to increase the overall effectiveness of any type of persuasive message.

### Attitudes

One of the primary methods of increasing message effectiveness is matching the message to the target audience. As covered in the **RAPPORT** section on “Relevance,” understanding the visitors’ needs, attitudes, and motives is one key to success in message formation. For example, if you are presenting a message to a group of horseback riders identifying the need to remove horseback riding from an area, your approach should be very different than if you are presenting the same program to a group of backpackers. There are three potential attitudes a visitor could have about any given subject: for it, against it, or neutral. Appropriate strategies for each are given in the box below (Table 3.6).

Know thy audience			Table 3.6
They are for it	They are against it	They are neutral	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Spend</b> little time giving facts and evidence (they already support you)</li><li>• <b>Focus</b> most of the message on action statements (what they can do now)</li><li>• <b>Provide</b> opportunities for them to contribute (let them share their knowledge)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Establish</b> common ground (begin with what you both have in common)</li><li>• <b>Identify</b> the facts/ information from their side (take away arguments before they can use them against you)</li><li>• <b>Point</b> out the major elements from your perspective (use only items which can easily be demonstrated - credibility is crucial)</li><li>• <b>End</b> with common actions that both sides can agree on (leave them with things that you share in common)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Provide</b> information (they have <i>not</i> made up their mind-educate them)</li><li>• <b>Present</b> both sides of a logical argument (don't let them wonder what the <i>other</i> side is)</li><li>• <b>Conclude</b> with sources of opportunities to learn more</li></ul>	

# Message



Sometimes visitors just need to be reminded about an existing attitude. Most visitors in our parks care about the resources within them, and our messages simply need to remind or prime visitors of that already held belief. Successful persuasive messages must also convey to visitors that their behavior makes a difference and that they are responsible for that difference (Fishbein and Manfredo, 1992; Petty and Cacioppo, 1984; Vincent and Fazio, 1992). Research supports this theory and indicates that if messages are to affect behavior through attitudes, the appropriate attitude regarding the behavior must be primed. Visitors must be able to predict what will happen after a behavior and must be willing to accept responsibility for those consequences.

## ***Helping them own it***

***It is so nice to see everyone out here because you love and care about our natural resources. Remember, the tide pool animals need your help to survive. If you remove them from the rocks even once, it can kill them. It is up to you to keep your tide pools alive and healthy.***

## **Norms**

Another method of increasing message effectiveness is to make use of the expected and accepted norms for behavior. Every situation, social group, and setting has a set of expected norms for behavior. For example, laughing during a funeral is not the norm for behavior. Two types of norms are social norms and descriptive norms. Social norms reflect the most accepted form of behavior in any given situation that people *should* be doing, and descriptive norms tell us what others *are* doing. The most successful messages will incorporate both types of norms in conjunction with each other (Cialdini, 1996). In other words, what we tell visitors to do (social norm)—e.g., “*Do not litter*”—should be in line with what we say others are doing (descriptive norm), e.g., “*99% of visitors do not litter.*” Using norms to affect behavior works because people are influenced by the expectations of others and by the social pressure of what they think others are doing (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). For example, if visitors believe that most everyone walks off the trail (descriptive norm), it will be difficult to convince them they should not (social norm). After all, *everyone is doing it*, how much more could I hurt it?

## **Specific requests**

When trying to influence behavior, it is important to be specific with behavioral requests. Do not use general statements like “*Help us protect the resource.*” Remember, most deprecative behavior occurs out of ignorance, and asking someone to protect the resource assumes that they know how to do so. “*Help us protect the resource by staying on the trail*” conveys the specific behavior you want them to perform. Compliance with this request will be much higher than with the generic one.



## Message

### Positive spin

Try to frame messages in a positive light. For example, the above message, “*Help us protect the resource by staying on the trail,*” is positive. “*Do not hike off the trail as it damages the resource*” is the same message framed in a negative way. People respond better to positive messages than to negative ones.

### Reasons why

Another approach that is very effective for influencing others is to always tell people why you want them to do something. Identifying the reason behind the rule prevents visitors from guessing the reason and deciding it is not that important. In addition, Wallace (1990) suggests reasons for behavioral requests should be told in reference to the resource first, the visitor second, and the management third. Visitors are more likely to modify their behavior to protect the resource or other people than to satisfy management. In addition, knowing the reasons behind the rules makes *you* more informed and thus a better interpreter. If you cannot identify the reason behind the rule in terms of the resource or the visitor, then how can you expect a visitor to do so on his or her own?

#### **Always tell ‘em why**

***Please stay on the trail as we pass through this area. The plants here are very fragile and even one step can crush them. Like yourself, there are thousands of other visitors that come to the park every year to see the wildflowers. Staying on the trail will assure that the next visitors get to have the same experience as you are having now.***

### Moral reasoning

Moral reasoning theories suggest persuasive messages should include both a message - addressing lower stages of moral development (preconventional) and higher levels of moral development (postconventional) (Christensen and Dustin, 1989; Kohlberg, Levine, and Hower, 1983). Individuals in lower or preconventional stages of moral development respond to messages that promise a reward or threaten punishment. Children most closely reflect this level of moral development. Individuals in the postconventional moral stages of development respond to what others think and the ethics associated with a behavior. Messages should be tailored to the stage of moral reasoning held by the target individual. For example, individuals in the preconventional stage of moral development will be more likely to change behavior in response to threats of punishment or promises of rewards than to ethical appeals. On the other hand, individuals in the postconventional stages of moral reasoning will tend to be more responsive to ethical appeals.

#### **Appeal to their morals**

**Preconventional message:** *There is a \$1,000 fine for littering.*

**Postconventional message:** *Leave the resource as you found it - without litter.*



## Shotgun approach

The final suggestion for improving persuasive message appeal is to use a combination of several of the approaches previously discussed. Many researchers have concluded that no one strategy will likely be found to effectively control all depreciative behaviors in parks (Knopf and Dustin, 1992; Van de Kamp, Johnson, and Swearingen, 1994; Widner and Roggenbuck, 2000). In other words, incorporating multiple persuasive techniques should increase the overall effectiveness of a single message. For example, if norm appeals (everyone is doing it) reach some people and moral reasoning messages can be used to influence others, a message that includes both approaches should be more effective overall than messages based on any single approach.

### Putting it all together

***Look around the group at all the others just like yourself who care deeply about the natural resources here in the park. Protecting the park's resources is up to each one of you. Although 99% of park visitors do not disturb the tide pool animals, a small fraction cause an enormous amount of damage. Please do remove any of the animals from their homes. They deserve to live and other visitors should have the same opportunity as you to see them. There is a fine for damaging the tide pools, but destruction costs the animals their lives. Thanks for helping us protect your treasures in the park.***



***The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself.***

Henry Miller

### Cover all the bases

- **Make** it relevant to the visitor
- **Present** accurate information
- **Have** fun
- **Leave** them wanting to know more
- **Ensure** program accessibility
- **Present** organized information
- **Help** visitors to retain messages
- **Use** thematic approach
- **Tap** into visitor attitudes
- **Relate** the consequences for behavior
- **Always** tell why
- **Positively** frame messages
- **Appeal** to morals
- **Give** specific behavioral requests

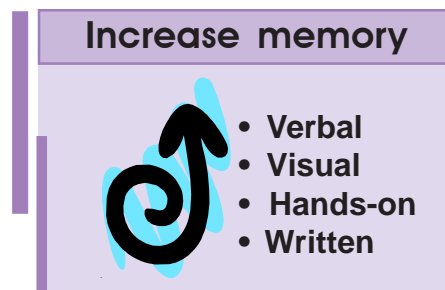




## Encoding

### Encoding

There are numerous mediums (or channels) through which a message can be communicated to visitors. Verbal, visual, hands-on, and written are the four primary methods. Encoding is the process of coding a message into a particular channel to be communicated to visitors. Deciding which channel will be the most effective depends on numerous factors including the target audience, the message itself, the time frame, the interpreter, and the resource being interpreted. Each channel has its own characteristics and benefits. The key for interpreters is that as more of the channels are incorporated, the visitor remembers more. Do you remember more if someone *tells* you something or if you *do* it? The most retention comes when we see it, hear it, *and* do it.



### Receiving

There are many characteristics of the visitor that affect the communication process. Although we cannot change or affect these characteristics, it is important to be aware of their impact on the communication process.

#### **Visitor characteristics**

- **World view** - The visitors' view of and belief system about the world influences communication. Visitors selectively receive and process information that supports an established belief system. This is known as emotional deafness.
- **Significant others** - The social group that the visitor is in impacts communication. For example, a teenage boy surrounded by his friends will react differently than the same boy in his family group. This could be considered peer pressure.
- **Knowledge/experience level** - What a visitor knows about a subject influences the communication process. Previous knowledge can positively or negatively affect the process depending upon perceived credibility of the sender.
- **Attitude toward the agency** - A visitor's belief system regarding California State Parks will impact judgments of credibility and trustworthiness.
- **Personal distractions** - Visitors' social, physical, and emotional settings create various degrees of distraction.
- **Information needs/motives** - Visitors' motives and needs for information impact what is retained.



## Receiving



Another element that influences communication is barriers. There are often hindrances to the communication process inherent to the individual, such as language and physical barriers. Language barriers can result from differences in semantics, dialect, language origin, and jargon. For example, being aware of language barriers should promote the inclusion of more sensory exploration, hands-on demonstrations, analogies, and avoidance of too much technical vocabulary. Physical barriers to communication could also be inherent to the individual. For example, can the visitor see, hear, or navigate adequately to experience the program? What is the trail surface like? Is there another more accessible trail where you could do the same program? These and other similar questions are important for you to consider when designing communication opportunities. Please refer to *All Visitors Welcome*, a publication produced for California State Parks, for more details and suggestions on addressing accessibility issues (Porter, 1994). In addition, we will review program-specific accessibility concerns and techniques in later modules.

*The seeds of great discoveries are constantly floating around us, but they only take root in minds well prepared to receive them.*

Joseph Henry

## Decoding

Decoding is the process that happens after information is communicated from the interpreter to the visitor. There are three primary steps that information goes through once it has been communicated. Each of these steps impacts the ultimate goal of communication, the understanding or exchange of meaning. The first step after the sender gives the message is reception. Not all information is heard, remembered, or comprehended. The second step is acceptance or rejection of the information. Given what a visitor heard and understood, value judgments about the information are then made. Once the information has been judged, then appropriate parts are assimilated (or not) into the existing belief system.

### Visitors decoding incoming information

#### When communication is sent....

- **What** did you hear?
- **What** did you understand?
- **What** do you remember from what you heard and understood?
- **What** do you think about what you remembered?
- **Do** you believe it?
- **Do** you think it is valuable and useful information for you?
- **If so**, how will you integrate it into your world view?
- **Will** it impact your behavior?



## Decoding

There are many elements that impact the decoding process. One of the primary elements is that individuals learn and process information differently. For example, many people need visual cues to understand a new concept while others may only need to hear it to understand. Even within the individual, there are times when details are needed for comprehension and other times when the big picture will do. Although we cannot control how a visitor decodes our messages, understanding the basic approaches to processing information will assist us in creating interpretive opportunities that incorporate all visitors. Tilden's fifth principle reminds us that interpretation must address itself to the many phases of an individual. This means that at any given time for any one individual, there are numerous ways information is processed or learned.

One way to distinguish information-processing styles is the brain. Right brain processing involves visual, intuitive, emotional, and spatial elements. It is the creative side of the brain. Techniques for involving right brain thinkers include anything that incorporates the senses or emotions. To reach this group, remember that emotions are often more important than facts. Left-brain processing involves factual, linear, logical thought. To engage these logical processors, include facts, ideas, concepts, and the relationships among them.

Another way to discuss decoding is to consider the style of learning. There are three primary styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual learners must see the information in order to understand it. Whether it is seeing the printed word, a picture, or the object itself, a visual learner must engage visually with information. Auditory learners must hear information. The voice of the interpreter and the sounds of the resource serve to reach auditory learners. Kinesthetic learners must interact with information. Demonstrations, hands-on activities, and tactile sensory involvement with the resources address these learners.

It is important to realize that although individuals may align more closely with one information-processing style or another, the manner in which information is processed depends on numerous factors. At any given moment, you will not know how an individual is processing information much less the variety of individuals within your audience; therefore your success results from including myriad information processing opportunities.

### Increase decoding success

- **Incorporate** all the senses
- **Tell** stories and paint pictures
- **Engage** visitors directly with the resource
- **Use** visual aids and props
- **Convey** facts and information
- **Highlight** relationships and ideas
- **Demonstrate** concepts



## Feedback

Feedback is the process through which an interpreter can determine if communication is effective. This is essentially evaluating message reception. Feedback is also considered to be communication in reverse from the receiver back to the sender of the original message. Thus, communication is a two-way process of sending and receiving information. There are three basic types of feedback: verbal, visual, and written. Each method has its own limitations and benefits in the communication process. For example, written feedback may be some of the most rigorous, but it is often the most time consuming and difficult to acquire. Conversely, visual feedback is quick but not often very informative. For example, as you describe something, you see an audience with furrowed brows. This might tell you they do not understand what you are saying and you should try another method of explanation. However, it will not tell you why they do not understand. For each type of feedback (written, visual, and verbal), there are various methods of modification possible for improving communication. We will discuss evaluation and other methods of ascertaining feedback at length in Module 12-Evaluation.

## Real world

The final element of the communication model is the context within which communication takes place. The resource, setting, and the environment itself impact the communication process. Although you cannot change the resource, you can change the place you choose to present the information. For example, standing next to a loud waterfall is probably not the best place to talk about water dynamics. Sometimes distractions are impossible to avoid. The key is to minimize them as often as possible and always be aware of the factors in the setting that pose distracting components for the audience. Another element of the environment to consider is whether or not it imposes an unnecessary barrier to communications. In other words, is the trail too difficult or too long? Are there any unnecessary physical barriers in place in the environment that might prevent the participation of anyone with limited physical ability? Please refer to *All Visitors Welcome*, a publication produced for California State Parks, for more details and suggestions for addressing accessibility issues (Porter, 1994).

### Minimize distractions

- **Place** the sun in your eyes, not the eyes of your audience.
- **Do not** forget Maslow...is it too hot? too cold? too windy? too scary?
- **Be** aware of noise distractions, especially unnatural ones.
- **Interpretation** should not be a distraction to the awe inspiring moment.
- **Avoid** unnatural physical elements (parking lot, houses).



## What's ahead

### What's ahead



The basic principles of communication are the foundation of all interpretation. Now that we have a grasp of the generic communication model, let us examine the steps involved with planning specific programs using chosen mediums for target audiences in a particular location. We will examine the basic steps of the planning process and how planning is used to create maximum effectiveness of our messages.

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# Communication



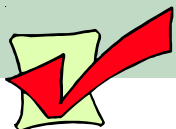


## Self assessment



Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in Module 3-Communication. The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read Module 3-Communication. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

- 1) The primary goal of all communication is to:
  - a) Persuade or change behavior
  - b) Educate the listener
  - c) Transfer a message between two sources
  - d) Solicit a response from the listener
  
- 2) Research suggests that on average a listener retains \_\_\_\_\_ percent of what is verbally presented to them.
  - a) 10%
  - b) 30%
  - c) 50%
  - d) 60%
  
- 3) There are \_\_\_\_ basic steps to the communication process.
  - a) 3
  - b) 4
  - c) 5
  - d) 6
  
- 4) Which of the following does **not** usually influence visitors' judgments about an interpreter's credibility?
  - a) Height
  - b) Uniform
  - c) Voice
  - d) Body language
  
- 5) Eye contact is one of the most important indicators of credibility. (Explain your answer.)
  - a) True
  - b) False



## Self assessment



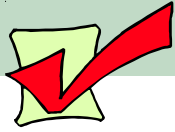
- 6) The acronym \_\_\_\_\_ stands for the California State Parks system of establishing and measuring good communication.
- a) COMMUNICATE
  - b) TALK
  - c) RAPPORT
  - d) MESSAGE
- 7) For an interpretive message to reach the audience it should be:
- a) Detailed
  - b) Documented
  - c) Relevant
  - d) A new idea
- 8) What is a universal concept?
- 9) There are definitely some inherently boring topics. (Explain your answer.)
- a) True
  - b) False
- 10) The acronym ADA stands for:
- a) All Disabilities Able
  - b) Americans with Disabilities Act
  - c) Add Dimensions of Access
  - d) All Do Attend
- 11) Which of the following is not used to help organize an oral presentation:
- a) Cognitive map
  - b) Transition sentences
  - c) Practice
  - d) Spatial map



## Self assessment



- 12) What is the difference between a theme and a topic?
- 13) All interpretive messages are aimed at influencing the visitor. (Explain your answer.)
- a) True
  - b) False
- 14) Descriptive norms are:
- a) What others expect you to do
  - b) What everyone else is doing
  - c) What you think you should do
  - d) What significant others in your life think you should do
- 15) Which type of message is more effective at changing behavior?
- a) Neutral
  - b) Negative
  - c) Positive
  - d) Fear
- 16) You should always tell visitors the reason why you request a particular behavior.
- a) True
  - b) False
- 17) Who developed a six-step hierarchy of needs that is widely used to understand the visitor needs?
- a) B. F. Skinner
  - b) Robert Marshall
  - c) Abraham Maslow
  - d) William Penn Mott Jr.

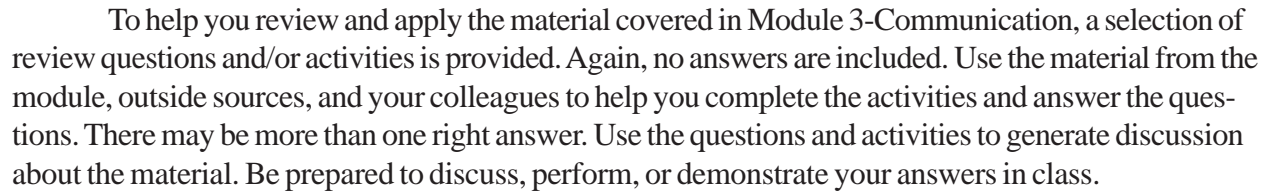


## Self assessment



- 18) The most common place for providing information to visitors is:
- a) During a formal interpretive program
  - b) While conducting roving interpretation
  - c) On the phone
  - d) In the visitor center or entrance station

**Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in Module 3-Communication to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.**



- 1) Which step of the communication process do you think is the most important for a successful interpretive presentation? Why?
- 2) You have been asked to give a presentation to a group of mushroom collectors to explain why they can no longer collect in the park. What can you do to maximize the effectiveness of your message?





- 4) You are leading a group of 30 visitors on a walk through the park and spot a baby snake. You point out the snake and explain a little about its natural history. As you continue the walk, you turn around to check on your group and see a young boy stomp on the snake and kill it. Several other group members also witness the behavior. How should you handle this situation?



## Workbook learning activities



5) Indicate how you could help visitors relate to each item below.

Topic	Make it relate
A volcanic eruption	<i>it's like shaking a can of soda</i>
The movement of a snake	
Ocean waves	
The tides	
Geologic time	
Seasons	
Fog	
Cultural diversity	
Size of a redwood	
Depth of the ocean	
Earthquakes	
Desert plant life	
Significance of a tribal dance	
Importance of CSP	
Role of a ranger	
Importance of history	



## Communication

1) What features exist in your park that might negatively affect the success of the communication process (natural barriers, distractions, etc.)?

2) One of the most important aspects for conducting successful, meaningful interpretation is to know your park. What are the primary critical management issues/concerns that should be interpreted in your park?



- 08/2004